

Why Oncology Massage?  
Bruce A. Hopkins, LMT, S4OM

May you be at peace.  
May your heart remain open.  
May you awaken to the light of your own true nature.  
May you be healed.  
May you be a source of healing for all beings.  
*The Metta of the Buddha*

Having cancer (or caring for a loved one with cancer) is one of life's most difficult experiences. The resulting stress makes the unpleasant parts of the cancer journey even worse. Among the many conditions aggravated by stress are: pain, fatigue, nausea, depression, anxiety, loss of appetite, fuzzy thinking, and distorted body image.

There are three definitive treatments for stress: medication, meditation and massage. Medication suppresses the outward symptoms but often has undesirable side effects. Meditation requires extensive practice and self-discipline. Massage requires only the willingness to lie quietly and be cared for.

Gentle, soothing, non-invasive massage brings on a profoundly restful meditative state that includes the physiological effect called the relaxation response. Research shows that the mind slows or stops, muscles relax, stress hormones decrease, breathing and heart rates drop, sleep and digestion improve and immune system function increases.

In this meditative state awareness of time, bodily discomforts and cares of the world fade away. The restorative effects often last for days and typically increase over multiple sessions. One client describes it as, "A vacation from cancer." It is rare indeed for a cancer patient to try massage and not come back again and again.

**But** - there is a complication. It is well established that anyone in cancer treatment or who has recently completed treatment is at increased risk of certain injuries from traditional massage techniques. Furthermore, some treatment histories place survivors at lifelong increased risk.

Oncology massage is individually adapted to each client's personal medical situation for safety and effectiveness. Massage therapists who are qualified to do this work have been trained by recognized instructors according to standards specified by the Society for Oncology Massage ([www.s4om.org](http://www.s4om.org)). These therapists work in leading hospitals and cancer centers across the U.S. and in many private offices and clinics.

